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ABSTRACT

This article examines some popular theories of classroom management in an effort to generate practical suggestions for teachers and administrators who deal with youngsters on a day-to-day basis. The suggestions are presented in an alphabetical arrangement and cover many areas of concern to educators. Some of the topics covered are: audience, flexibility, expectations, goals, fairness, organization, and humor, using "I" messages, selling one's subject matter, dealing with serious and less serious behavior problems, and rule enforcement. The paper concludes with some suggested readings for further study of the subject. (Contains 10 references.) (ND)

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According to a recent poll, discipline remains a major topic of concern among educators (Elam, Rose and Gallup, 1995). The poll data further suggest that the public shares these concerns. Classroom management is a major concern of teachers and one that requires many special skills (Charles, 1995). Teachers are required to perform a juggling act of monitoring and controlling student behavior while presenting meaningful instruction. Many teachers report that as their classroom management skills improve, students correspondingly become more cooperative and productive. But, when teachers are not able to manage their classrooms, they frequently incur the additional burden of difficulties with parents (Charles, 1992).

This article examines the work of some major contributors to the body of knowledge regarding classroom management and discipline. It is a survey of some popular theories of classroom management coupled with experience gained from over twenty years of teaching and administering public and parochial schools. It is an effort to generate practical suggestions for teachers and administrators who deal with youngsters on a day-to-day basis. The suggestions are designed to assist teachers, both novice and experienced develop, refine and perfect their classroom management skills. "Classroom Management from A to Z," covers many areas of concern to educators and concludes with some suggested readings for further study of the subject.

A

Audience:

Read your audience. Entertainers often speak of "reading" their audience. If they are "bombing" they can tell from the behavior of the audience. You should try to read your

students to see how the class is going. If they are too hot, too cold, or distracted by outside forces learning may not take place. Many times you will have no control over these variables but at least you can allow for them and act accordingly. Be attentive to noise, temperature, and distractions in the classroom and surrounding it. For instance you can permit chilly students to wear coats and permit extra trips to the water fountain on unbearably hot days.

B

Be flexible:

Be willing to switch strategies when they are not working. Sometimes, tried and true teaching strategies will just not work. Be ready to swing to another teaching strategy if everything seems to be breaking down. If the class is not progressing through the instructional material, perhaps you should change activities for a while and return to the trouble spot later.

C

Canter:

Use the broken record approach. This approach was popularized by Lee Canter and Associates (1992). It is a method of dealing with students and not allowing oneself to be drawn into arguments or power struggles. It minimizes classroom disruption by cutting out student arguments and long-winded explanations. When students are corrected, many respond with denials or arguments to throw the accuser off track or divert the blame to someone else. It is a face-saving technique and in many cases is so successful that many students use it in most of their day-to-day dealings. For example:

Teacher: Kyle, stop talking so we can hear Heather's answer.
Kyle: It's not me, It's Brian who is talking!
Teacher: I understand Kyle, but you must stop talking.
Kyle: But I'm not talking, you're always picking on me.
Teacher: I understand Kyle, but you have to stop talking so we can continue class.
Kyle: Well OK, but it wasn't me talking anyway.

D

Don't:

Hesitate to borrow ideas from other teachers. Make sure to convert the ideas to concepts that you are comfortable with; you must make the concept work for you personally. You cannot carry off the ideas of others successfully without converting the idea to your teaching style and personality. If you do not feel comfortable implementing an idea, stop and work with the idea until you see the match between your personality and way of doing things and then see how you will successfully carry it out with your class. Internalize the work of others.

E

Expect:

Don't expect to be heard the first time. When dealing with a large number of students (anything over ten children) make sure your message is received. If idle talking and conversations are in progress, your message will not be heard. Expect to repeat anything important several times. Repeat rules, concepts, directions and anything important till you are blue in the face. Some students daydream most of the school day. If you repeat important things at least five times, most students will absorb them.

F

Fairness:

Be fair. Fairness is so important to young people. This means if you goof, admit it; if you do not know, say so; if you are wrong, apologize. Humor can be used in apologies. "This is the first mistake I've made in all my years teaching!" will get smiles from most children. If you make a promise to a class, make sure to honor it. Never reprimand a group by promising a reward and later decide to withhold it. Treat girls the same as boys--treat male parents the same as female parents--always be fair.

G

Goals:

Work on one behavior modification at a time. Select several goals to implement in your class. Decide which one would be the best one to implement first; perhaps limiting student call-outs during lessons. Try to reduce the undesirable behavior to an acceptable level. Then, select another undesirable behavior, such as eliminating interruptions while others are speaking, that you would like to eliminate from the class. This focuses the class' efforts and the students are only asked to work on one improvement at a time.

H

Holler:

If you holler, you will regret it. Never yell (in anger) at students. Some children enjoy seeing adults rattled or upset. Shouting and yelling are signs of a loss of control on the part of an adult; do not fall into this trap. Some ineffective teachers try using yelling techniques to intimidate youngsters. A quiet and patient manner is much more effective.

I

"I" messages:

Use them. They were popularized by Ginott (1972). Instead of accusing or name-calling, the technique allows everyone to save face. Teachers turn each dialogue to an "I" message. For example:

Teacher: Darren, I feel very frustrated when you disrupt class by talking when others are answering.

Teacher: Heather, I want you to concentrate on your work not the work of others around you.

Instead of referring to students as "you" and accusing or resorting to name-calling, the student hears the teacher basing everything on the term "I"; generalizing is avoided. Instead of "You are behaving like an idiot," the teacher might state, " I need you to..."

J

Join:

Join the sales force. Sell your subject matter. Every effort must be made to motivate learners and increase interest in the topic at hand. Your enthusiasm, or lack of it, will be readily apparent to your class. If you act bored or indifferent toward your subject matter, students will simply go through the motion of attending to the topic.

K

Kounin:

Kounin recommends that you provide progress, challenge and variety in your class. Kounin's (1977) vast research on classroom instruction and successful teachers led him to focus on the type of activities planned by teachers. He feels that the type of activity planned is the key to

reducing misbehavior. With this in mind, he proposes the following three guiding principles for teachers: first, provide progress; next, challenge students; and finally, provide variety. Not all school activities can be made interesting or fun, but following Kounin's principles will maintain a classroom pace that will help to avoid tension and boredom (this is progress). Challenge means simply to match the student with meaningful activity that is balanced; not too easy, not too hard. Variety provides the spice of the classroom the way it does life. Try using various media. Television, videos, recordings, filmstrips, games and puzzles are well worth the effort.

L

Learn:

Learn to lose gracefully. Identifying exactly who the culprits are can sometimes be a losing battle. If you cannot determine who to reprimand, then do not reprimand anyone--you win some--you lose some. In this case, learn to lose gracefully. Do not make a big deal out of small concerns.

M

Major problems only:

Send only serious (really serious) cases to the office. Meet with your principal and determine in advance exactly what behavior will result in sending a student to the principal's office. Discuss this and rehearse exactly what will happen. The students will see you handling your own problems without help from the administrator. Administrators will appreciate you because you only send the cases that actually require their help; when you finally do send a student to the office, you will get the full support of administrators.

N

No Pets:

Don't have teacher's pets. Two early researchers, Redl and Wattenberg (1959), observed many "teacher's pet" phenomena. They observed that students are quick to notice which students are given favored treatment by the teacher, even if the treatment is deserved for work well-done. Considerable resentment was harbored by students toward the teacher and their pets. When the group believes that a teacher is playing favorites, it reacts with jealousy and resentment. This indicates that teachers and administrators must be careful not to show favoritism, whether consciously or unconsciously, in dealing with youngsters. When teachers need to give individual students extra help, they must make sure that it is seen as necessary and impartial (Charles, 1992).

O

Organize:

Organize yourself for success. Arrive early enough to collect your thoughts and get ready for instruction. If you walk into school at the same time as the children, you are doomed to restless classes that misbehave while waiting for you to get your act together.

P

Popularity contest:

Do not participate in popularity contests. Everyone likes to be liked. Teachers are no different, but they must not confuse being sweet and likeable with being a pushover (as far as rule enforcement is concerned). You can still be friendly and firmly enforce rules in a reasonable manner. It is hard to monitor behavior and assert authority and still be friendly,

but humor helps. Also, if students have helped make their own rules, they are more likely to observe them without constant reminding. Trying to be liked can result in inconsistent rule enforcement, a real source of trouble for teachers.

Q

Quell:

Quell disruptions, but do not ever beg students to behave. Begging students will get you nowhere. It is better to ask students, "Why are you doing that?" to call attention to the behavior. Many times, the student will answer and see that their behavior is negative (Glasser, 1986.) Then, ask the student to desist WITHOUT making a big deal about it. If misbehavior continues, follow through with your consequences for rule breakers.

R

Remember:

What works with some groups--may not work with others. Be ready to switch gears. Some groups have special dynamics and may require extra (or maybe even less) attention. Do not expect every class to cover the same material in the same amount of time, produce the same noise level, etc.

S

Struggles:

Do not get drawn into power struggles. This means carefully pointing out infractions and enforcing discipline without inflaming students and making things worse. Never back students into a corner--they have to be allowed to save face. Some will even draw you into a power struggle because they mistakenly feel a need to assert themselves. Do not argue with

students or allow yourself to be drawn into arguments. Try the broken record technique popularized by Lee Canter and Associates (1992) and use "I" messages (Ginott, 1972).

T

Try to ignore:

Try to ignore some behaviors. You cannot correct every misbehavior. Learn what behaviors to ignore. If the misbehavior may spread through the class and cause serious disruption, take action. But, remember that minor outbreaks and occurrences are inevitable. Accept some things as inevitable; do not read meaning into all things that happen in your classroom.

U

Use humor:

Use humor all of the time. The use of humor can be an invaluable tool in dealing with curious youngsters. Try answering nosey questions with the following replies:

Student: How old are you, teacher?
Teacher: I am 99, but I don't look a day over 80.

Student: Are you married, teacher?
Teacher: Yes, I have 4 husbands (or wives.)

The sillier the better, but the use of humor stops personal and other inappropriate questions.

V

Verdict:

The verdict must fit the crime. All consequences must be reasonable. Children expect discipline, rules and order. They will consider the enforcement of rules as necessary unless the punishment does not fit the crime. Glasser (1986) suggests that all consequences for misbehavior be reasonable. A reasonable consequence for chewing gum is removing the

gum and disposing of it properly. A reasonable consequence for bringing toys to class is confiscation of the toy allowing for retrieval at a later time. Unreasonable consequences are unduly harsh punishments and group punishments. For example, idle talkers should not bring on a group punishment such as losing recess. A reasonable consequence would merely be a reprimand for the talker as quickly as possible and a return to the lesson with the least possible class-time lost.

W

Wall of resolve:

You must become a wall of resolve. Expect student to "try you out." They are experimenting to see how far they can push rules. Many just want to see if you say what you mean. Therefore, do not be surprised by blatant rule breaking. The students are trying out you as well as the rule. Be painfully consistent and enforce all rules all of the time.

X

X-ray vision:

Use "x-ray vision" to stop inappropriate behavior immediately. You must deal with disruptive behavior before it escalates. An area of interest to Redl and Wattenberg (1959) is the psychology of the group. They noticed that negative behavior seemed contagious and could spread if there was no teacher intervention. (Kounin and Canter also mention this in their writing.) Some teachers ignore misbehavior, hoping it will go away. Misbehavior can spread and escalate if not halted in the early stages. Watching classmates enjoy notoriety and recognition can lead others to initiate the undesirable behavior to gain attention themselves. Do not give misbehavior time to spread. Many times a simple nod or head shake from the

teacher to acknowledge the inappropriate behaviors will be enough to halt it. It lets the class know that nothing goes unnoticed by the teacher. Do not make too big a deal about it, just get the undesirable behavior halted before it spreads. Good behavior should be rewarded and encouraged as it too can spread to others, although not as consistently and rapidly as bad behavior.

Y

You:

You can tell by the way students act in front of strangers. Redl and Wattenberg (1959) noticed that students behave differently in groups than when in isolation. They also noticed that the class reaction to strangers was very telling. They found students of popular teachers very well behaved in the presence of strangers, while students of unpopular teachers deliberately misbehaved. Observe the way your students react to strangers and see if your findings are the same.

Z

Zoom in:

Zoom in on misbehavior. Know what is happening in all areas of your classroom at all times. Some of Kounin's (1977) major findings are relevant to classroom teachers. A teacher should know what is happening in all areas of the classroom and communicate this to the students ("with-it-ness"). They will feel that the teacher has "eyes in the back of his/her head." Kounin found that many misbehaving students did so because they thought that the behavior was unnoticed by the teacher. Kounin also suggests that a teacher should be able to deal with more than one issue at a time (overlapping). Since there are so many interactions in

the modern classroom, teachers must become skilled in juggling the various demands simultaneously. Kounin found that if students perceive that teachers are able to choose the right culprit and correct the behavior, they are less likely to misbehave. Finally (as with Redl and Wattenberg), Kounin suggests that when teachers correct the appropriate misbehaving student, it often influences the behavior of nearby students and prevents escalation.

The strategies presented in this article can be especially important to new teachers. Wong (1991) feels that what new teachers say and do on the first day of school can make or break them. He wrote an excellent guide for new teachers called, The First Days of School, that spells out how to start the school year properly so that the remainder of the year will run smoothly.

Veteran as well as novice teachers can benefit from the exhaustive work of two researchers. The first, C. M. Charles, has written several classic books on the topic of classroom management. His focus is to help teachers develop an eclectic, personalized system of classroom discipline relevant to their own personality and teaching situation. His book, Building Classroom Discipline (1992), contains perhaps the best survey available of the various models of classroom management and discipline. Charles feels that teachers can control behavior and maintain positive personal relations and explains these techniques and how they are used in his various texts such as Elementary Classroom Management (1995).

The second authoritative researcher is Carolyn M. Evertson, et. al. who in *Classroom Management for Elementary Teachers* (1994), provides numerous checklists to help teachers organize and remain focused on critical areas of classroom management. Two sections of

the book hold particular promise for teachers. The sections of the book on managing problem behavior and managing special groups hold particular promise for teachers.

Teachers must develop systematic means for dealing with classroom disruptions. This article and the suggested readings can be used to help teachers develop just such an individual classroom management plan. As Evertson, et. al. (1994) point out, effective classroom management does not just happen. Teachers must develop strategies to guide what they can do to create well-managed classrooms.

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